DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 213 CG 015 196

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TITLE Influence of Life Cycle Stage on Family Social Climate and Attitudes Toward the Residential Environment.
PUB DATE Sep 80
NOTE 17p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (88th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, September 1-5, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Building Design; Family Characteristics; *Family Environment; *Housing Needs; Living Standards; Place of Residence; Planning; Privacy; Quality of Life; Relocation; *Residential Patterns; *Social Characteristics; *Space Utilization; Spouses

ABSTRACT

The existing physical forms of housing are not always compatible with prevalent social patterns. To investigate the relationship between family system characteristics and attitudes about residential space, 64 Indiana families in 4 stages of the family life cycle (early years with no children, crowded years with at least one preschool child, peak years with no preschoolers but at least one school-age child, and later years with children who had left home) were interviewed. The husband and wife in each family completed the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Family Space Attitudes Form. Results showed that family type had a significant effect on 4 of the 10 FES subscales (Co- hesion, Independence, Organization, and Control) and on 3 of the 4 Family Space subscales (overall satisfaction, perception of stress, and identification of specific stressors). Findings indicated that environmental stressors and family social climate may differ among stages of the family life cycle. (NRB)

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ED203213

INFLUENCE OF LIFE CYCLE STAGE ON FAMILY SOCIAL CLIMATE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

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CG 015196

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, September, 1980.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family social climate and family attitudes and feelings toward their residential living space. Social climate in this study included the interpersonal relationships among family members, their directions of personal growth, and their basic organizational structure, which can also be classified as family systems characteristics.

While there is some information on relationships between family system characteristics and attitudes concerning residential space, more information is needed. Brolin and Zeisel (1968) reported that functional design must be planned to fit living patterns and cultural habits. John Zeisel, in his contributions to The Language of Environmental Design Research (1978) indicated that research methods for survey research to reveal attitudes of families and individuals toward their dwelling environment. Although his research does include attitude-type questionnaires, his prime method is observing physical traces of past events in order to measure the adequacy of planned environments (see Research Note).

At present, much of our architecture is socially inadequate. Existing physical form should be compatible with prevalent social patterns. For example, Goffman (1961) described the molding of human behavior by institutions and also (1959) the presentation of self being as it is enhanced by the environment. It is hypothesized that environmental stimuli that are outside a posited range of adaptation may be experienced as stressful, which, in turn, may activate coping processes which serve to return the family to a pre-stress level (Helson, 1964).

There are a number of approaches to studying the relationships between

family system characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors concerning space. Popenoe (1973) found that three main variables account for most residential differentiation: stage of life cycle, ethnicity, and social class. The indices of residential differentiation in his study were (1) communication, (2) social control, (3) sense of security and ease, (4) collective identity and sense of place, (5) socialization of children, and (6) organizational history. Moos (1976) made a study of 100 families measures on ten dimensions of their social environments. Certain dimensions, including expression-oriented, structure-oriented, independence-oriented, achievement-oriented, moral/religious-oriented, and conflict-oriented, showed systematic differences in background characteristics such as size, ethnic minority composition, drinking patterns, and family disturbance and incongruence.

Melson, Inman and Kemp (1977) reported in an exploratory study of 59 married student families that satisfaction, perceived stress, and adaptations were related to perceived family systems characteristics such as cohesiveness, organization and moral/religious orientation. In a report to the New York State Urban Development Corporation, Franklin Becker (1975) studied the residents' view of multi-family housing. Interviews and observations were made on attitudes and satisfaction with multi-family dwellings in various life cycle stages. Reported findings were in percentage of satisfaction with occupied facilities. No statistical tests were made on family life-cycle stage effects.

In summary, little is known concerning the relationship between family system characteristics and attitudes concerning residential space or the difference that may exist in each stage of the family life cycle. Beyer, Grady, Klinck, and Smith (1959) conducted a large regional study to examine

the use of dwellings for various types of activities. They found that the factor making a difference in the number and types of family activities reported was the stage of the family life cycle. That finding is the basis for the present proposal that family system characteristics and attitudes concerning residential space are related to stage of the family life cycle.

It is hypothesized that families in different stages of the family life cycle will differ in their attitudes and feeling toward residential living space and also in their social climate. The study reported here was exploratory, directed toward isolation of the various areas of social climate and their relationship to attitudes about family living spaces that are affected by stage of the family life cycle.

Materials and Methods

Sixty-four families in four stages of the family life cycle were interviewed for this project. The four stages were the early years (18 couples with no children), the crowded years (18 couples with at least one pre-school child), the peak years (16 couples with no pre-school children, but with at least one school-age child), and the later years (16 couples whose children have grown and left home). Criteria for selection were (1) marriage intact, (2) native-born Americans, and (3) Indiana resident.

The husband and wife in each family were administered two questionnaires: The Family Environment Scale: Form R (Moos, 1974, 1975) and The Family Space Attitudes Form that was adopted from The Family Space Inventory (Melson & Kemp, 1976).[1]

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[1] Family Space Inventory questionnaire was designed and tested by Gail F. Melson, Ph. D., and Pamela Kemp in the Child Development and Family Studies Department, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

The Family Environment Scale (FES) purports to measure social climate of the family along three dimensions: (1) relationship aspects, (2) personal growth or development aspects, and (3) systems maintenance aspects. Based upon the environmental press conceptualization of Henry Murray (1938), it assesses these three aspects of family social environment through the 90 true-false questions that comprise its ten nine-item subscales. The ten sub-scales are subdivided into three dimensions described below (Moos, 1974).

The Relationship dimensions include cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict, and assess the extent to which family members feel a belongingness to the family as a group. Cohesiveness measures the extent to which members are concerned and committed to family and the degree to which members are helpful and supportive of each other. Expressiveness refers to the extent to which members are allowed and encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings directly. Conflict is the extent to which open expression of aggression and conflictual interactions are characteristic of the family.

The Personal Development dimensions include independence, achievement, intellectual and cultural orientation, active recreational orientation, and moral/religious emphasis. These measure the emphasis within the family on certain developmental processes fostered by family living. Independence measures the degree to which scope of family members do things on their own, emphasizing autonomy. Achievement measures the amount of emphasis on academic and competitive activities. Intellectual and Cultural Orientation measures the extent to which families are interested in political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities. Active Recreational Orientation measures the extent to which the family actively participates in sports and recreational activities. Moral/Religious Emphasis is the extent to which the

family follows ethical and religious issues and values.

System Maintenance dimensions include organization and control. They obtain information about the organization or structure of the family and the degree of control family members have as a group over each other. Organization measures order and organization in terms of structuring the family activities, financial planning, and family rules and responsibilities. Control assesses the rigidity of family rules and procedures as well as family hierarchy.

Following a pilot study to determine test items valid for use with all family types, the 90-item ten-subscale form entitled Family Environment Scale was developed in accord with the following criteria. The overall item split should be as close to 50-50 as possible in order to avoid items characteristic only of extreme families. Items should correlate more highly with their own than with any other subscale. Each of the subscales should have an approximately equal number of items scored true and scored false in order to control for acquiescence response set. The final subscales had to show only low to moderate intercorrelations. Each item had to maximally discriminate among families.

The subscale intercorrelations average around .20 indicating that the subscales measure distinct, though somewhat related, dimensions of family social environments. K-R 20 measure of reliability ranges from .64 to .79. Average item-subscale correlation ranges from .45 to .58. Test-retest reliability ranges from .68 to .86. These reliabilities are within an acceptable range for purposes of this study.

The Family Space Attitudes (FSA) questionnaire collects information about overall satisfaction with the dwelling environment, perception of

stress, identification of specific stressors and reported adaptations to the environment. Four subscales are embedded: Present Environmental Stress, Adaptations Scale, Environmental Descriptors Checklist, and Specific Stress Index. These four subscales were developed in an earlier pilot study of 110 married student families. The items referring to possible stressors and adaptations were selected from a comprehensive list suggested by residents of the married student housing.

The Present Environmental Stress Scale requests that subjects compare their present living quarters to their previous living quarters by checking a point along a five-point continuum ranging from "much less" to "much more." The 16 adjectives comprising the scale are both negative, e.g., "noisy" and positive, e.g., "spacious." This scale provides an indication of level of present perceived stress. Responses to each PRES item are coded as follows: much less = 1, less = 2, about the same = 3, more = 4, much more = 5. Negative items are summed and subtracted from the sum of positive items. The possible range is - 40 to + 40.

The Adaptations Scale lists 20 adaptations to environmental stressors which pretesting revealed to be commonly made among Married Student Courts residents and asks the subjects to check "yes" or "no" to indicate whether or not the adaptation had been made since moving into the present living quarters. Representative items include "trying to get out more often," "setting up a schedule," "becoming more inhibited in lovemaking." The Adaptations Scale provides a measure of both number and type of adaptations made. The adaptations score is simply a count of the number of adaptations checked, ranging from 0 to 20.

The Environmental Descriptors Checklist instructs the subject to check

each of 11 negative and positive adjectives which describe his/her current feelings about the present housing. An adjective not checked is scored as one, and adjective checked is scored two. The sum of the six negative adjectives is subtracted from the sum of the five positive adjectives, providing a potential range of - 7 to + 4.

The Specific Stress Index asks a subject to rate each of 20 potential stressors on a four-point continuum ranging from "not stressful or applicable" to "very stressful." Stressors were selected on the basis of pretest information about housing features described as stressful and include items such as "amount of living space," "noise," and "design of kitchen." Responses to each SSI item are coded as follows: not stressful or applicable = 0, slightly stressful = 1, moderately stressful = 2, very stressful = 3. The SSI total score is the sum of all individual items. Range is 0 to 60.

Analyses of variance were used to test differences among the four stages of the life cycle in respect to their social climate and attitudes toward their residential environment. Since husband and wife scores were highly correlated in previous research using the FSI (Melson, Inman, & Kemp, 1977), they were combined for the analysis.

Findings

Family-type had a significant effect on four of the ten sub-scales of the FES, namely Cohesion ($F(3,64) = 3.146$, p .05), Independence ($F(3,64) = 2.654$, p .05), Organization ($F(3,64) = 2.812$, p .05), and Control ($F(3,64 = 3.606$, p .05). The other subscales, namely Expression, Conflict, Achievement, Intellectual/Cultural, Recreational, and Moral/Religious, were not significantly affected by family type. (See Table 1)

Family type had a significant effect on three of the four Family Space

Inventory subscales, namely Present Environmental Stress Scale ($F(3,64 = 8.024$, p .001), Adjectives Checklist ($F(3,64) + 7.403$, p .001) and the Specific Stress Index ($F(3,64) = 18.361$, p .001). The Adaptations Scale was not significantly related to family type. (See Table 2)

Individual questions in the Present Environmental Stress Scale were tested in a Chi-square distribution (P .05), and several were found to be significant with stage of the family life cycle. When rating their present dwelling with their immediate past housing, the couples in the later years stage felt that their present dwelling was more pleasant, but also more noisy than their previous home; the other stages reported their dwellings to be less pleasant, but also less noisy. The early and crowded stages felt their present dwellings to be more confining and depressing, while the other stages reported these to be less. Concerning storage space, the crowded stage reported less storage in their present dwelling, while the other three stages reported more.

Certain individual questions in the Environmental Descriptor Checklist also proved to be significant with stage of life cycle in a Chi-square distribution (p .05). The later and peak stages both reported that they were more contented, more comfortable, and more happy than the other two stages. The early years and the crowded stage felt more crowded in their dwelling than the other stages.

Several items in the Specific Stress Scale were significant with the stage of the family life cycle in Chi-square distribution (p .05). For the early and crowded stages, the amount of living space available and a lack of kitchen counter space proved to be more stressful than in the other stages. Women in the crowded stage were most stressed with lack of privacy,

while the men were concerned with poor lighting, heating, and ventilation. Both men and women in this stage were concerned with noise and a lack of soundproofing. These items did not seem to concern the other stages as much. The early stage was stressed by a lack of laundry equipment. The crowded and peak years were most stressed by a lack of outdoor space in comparison to the other stages.

Thus the hypothesis that the four stages of the family life cycle will differ in their attitudes toward their residential living spaces, as well as in their social climate, is supported for this sample in seven of the 14 subscales measured.

Discussion

The study under discussion was made in a small geographical areas with a small sample of families in each of the four stages of the family life cycle. Thus, the results can only be interpreted in relation to this particular sample. A larger population is needed to support further the hypothesis of this study.

Family Systems Maintenance, one of the three subdivisions of the FES, was significantly related to stage of the family life cycle in all areas, which included both family organization and control. Family Systems Maintenance involves the structure of the family and the degree of control family members have over each other.

The Present Environment Stress Scale, which compares the current dwelling unit of families with their immediate past dwelling unit, was significantly related to the stage of the family life cycle. Also, the Adjectives Checklist, which measured the general feelings a person has concerning the dwelling, yielded significant results.

Adaptations or adjustments to the dwelling environment did not yield significant results. These included such items as ignoring noise, decrease or entertaining, refurnishing the dwelling, and becoming more inhibited in lovemaking.

The Specific Stress index which measured variations of stress factors in the dwelling environment also proved to be significantly related to the life cycle stage of the family.

Thus, it is seen in this small study that environmental attitudes, as well as family organization, may indeed differ among the stages of the family life cycle. A large regional study could further assess the viability of the hypothesis under study in this paper. Data concerning the use of environmental space by the families in this sample were also collected for later analysis regarding their relationship to the family life cycle and also regarding the FSA and FES subscales tested here. Attitude studies concerning the dwelling in relation to the use of that dwelling will be explored in the near future. Also additional data to add to the study are being collected at this time.

This study found the four stages of the life cycle to significantly differ in certain areas of their family social climate and in their attitudes toward their dwelling unit. This information, coupled with the use of space in various types and sizes of dwellings, can be used to comply with the apparent need to improve the design of family residences in both single family and especially, multi-family housing.

Research Note

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TABLE 1

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT SCALE

- Subscale -

FAMILIES	DF	COHESION	INDEPENDENCE	ORGANIZATION	CONTROL
		MS	MS	MS	MS
Family - Type	3	16.99	14.62	39.67	43.43
Error	64	345.66	5.32	14.10	12.04

$p \leq .05$ (Analysis of Variance)

TABLE 2

FAMILY SPACE ATTITUDES

- Subscale -

FAMILIES	DF	PRESENT ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS SCALE	ADJECTIVE CHECKLIST	SPECIFIC STRESS INDEX
		MS	MS	MS
Family - Type	3	4149.59	142.47	887.91
Error	64	317.16	19.24	48.35

$p \leq .001$ (Analysis of Variance)